

Emotional Intelligence and Depressive Symptoms as Predictors of Happiness Among Adolescents

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Abstract

Background: Given that happiness is an important construct to enable adolescents to cope better with difficulties and stress of life, it is necessary to advance our knowledge about the possible etiology of happiness in adolescents.

Objectives: The present study sought to investigate the relationships of emotional intelligence, depressive symptoms, and happiness in a sample of male students in Tehran, Iran.

Materials and Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted on a sample of high school students in Tehran in 2012. The participants comprised of 188 male students (aged 16 to 19 years old) selected by multi-stage cluster sampling method. For gathering the data, the students filled out assessing emotions scale, Beck depression inventory-II, and Oxford happiness inventory. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive and analytical statistics in statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software.

Results: The findings showed that a significant positive association existed between high ability of emotional intelligence and happiness ($P < 0.01$). Conversely, the low ability of emotional intelligence was associated with unhappiness ($P < 0.01$), there was a positive association between non-depression symptoms and happiness ($P < 0.05$), and severe depressive symptoms were positively associated with unhappiness ($P < 0.01$). High ability of emotional intelligence ($P < 0.01$) and non-depression symptoms ($P < 0.05$) were the strongest predictors of happiness.

Conclusions: These findings reinforced the importance of emotional intelligence as a facilitating factor for happiness in adolescences. In addition, the findings suggested that depression symptoms may be harmful for happiness in adolescents.

Keywords: Depression, Emotional Intelligence, Iranian Students, Wellbeing

1. Background

So far, many studies have been undertaken about unhappy people; individuals with depression, anxiety or other mental disorders (1, 2). To the best of our knowledge, limited studies have been conducted on happy individuals. In recent years, some psychologists have concentrated on positive psychology, such as positive viewpoints in coping with stressors, depressive symptoms, and other difficulties in life (3). Such studies about behavioral and cognitive features of happy individuals can be useful for the treatment of individuals with mental disorders. Additionally, happiness is considered to be particularly important due to its contribution to adolescents' future success (4). Regarding the highly valued importance of happiness, we investigated the association of happiness with emotional intelligence and depressive symptoms in Iranian high school boys.

Happiness, which has been emphasized as one of the major features of positive psychology (5, 6), is recognized as an emotion; it is a mental evaluation of events with positive emotion associated with three components: rare frequencies of negative effect, repeated happenings of positive effect, and a high level of life satisfaction (1).

Therefore, happiness includes the emotional and cognitive aspects. It is one of the cognitive-motivational constructs; positive inner experience and motivator play important roles in mental and physical health of adolescents by preventing and protecting them to engage in mental and physical disorders (7).

It is evident from previous studies that happiness is an emotional-cognitive construct; therefore, it is possible that emotional intelligence is one of the factors that create happiness (8, 9). According to the model of Mayer et al. (10), emotional intelligence was defined as a kind of social intelligence, which includes the ability to monitor one's emotions and others' emotions, manipulating the information for managing one's thoughts and actions, regulating emotion in self and others, and utilizing suitable emotions to actively and effectively solve daily difficulties and obstacles (11). Attention to emotions refers to an individual's tendency to notice and ponder on his/her feelings and emotions. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to discriminate between positive and negative emotions. In addition, emotional intelligence can repair negative emotions even